

The Federal Voting Assistance Program

Seventeenth Report



October 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This is the seventeenth report since the enactment of the *Federal Voting Assistance Act* of 1955. It covers the time period from 2000 through 2005, with a focus on the November 2004 election. Certain sections include data from 2005 in order to provide current information on legislative initiatives and the DOD electronic voting project.

The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* of 1986 (42 USC 1973ff) provides the authority for the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP). Under the *UOCAVA*, the President designates the head of a federal department or agency to administer federal voting assistance responsibilities. The 1988 Executive Order 12642 named the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential designee for administering the *UOCAVA*. The Director, FVAP carries out the federal functions for the Presidential designee.

The *UOCAVA* requires the States/territories to allow certain citizens to register and vote in elections for federal offices using absentee procedures. These citizens include members of the Uniformed Services, the merchant marine, their family members; the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); federal civilian employees overseas; and other overseas U.S. citizens not affiliated with the federal government. These groups total more than 6 million eligible voters worldwide. In addition to voting in federal elections, most States/territories allow the Uniformed Services members to register and vote absentee for State/territory and local offices.

Executive Branch departments and agencies with employees overseas provide voting assistance under guidance from the Presidential designee. These departments and agencies utilize informational materials and services provided by FVAP. The Department of State (DOS), through its embassies/consulates, provides absentee voting information and assistance to U.S. citizens outside the United States. In addition, U.S. embassies/consulates, in selected areas, make the diplomatic pouch available to citizens for sending election materials back to the U.S.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and the DOD Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) facilitate the physical transmission of election materials between the voter and local election officials.

The General Services Administration (GSA) prints the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) and distributes these forms upon request from federal departments and agencies.

The U.S. Attorney General in the Department of Justice (DOJ) enforces the provisions of the *UOCAVA*.

Survey Overview

The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*, PL 99-410 (as amended), requires the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) to:

“not later than the end of each year after a Presidential election year, transmit to the President and the Congress a report on the effectiveness of assistance under this title, including a separate statistical analysis of uniformed services voter participation, a separate statistical analysis of overseas nonmilitary participation, and a description of State-Federal cooperation.”

Thus, the FVAP conducts a post-election survey: (1) to determine participation in the electoral process by *UOCAVA* citizens; (2) to assess the impact of the FVAP’s efforts to simplify and ease the process of voting absentee; (3) to evaluate other progress made to facilitate absentee voting participation; and (4) to identify any remaining obstacles to voting by these citizens.

In 2004, to evaluate the effectiveness of the FVAP and to obtain other information essential to improving absentee voting procedures, a separate survey was sent to each of the following 6 population groups: Uniformed Services members in the U.S. and overseas, federal civilians overseas, non-federally employed overseas citizens, local election officials, Uniformed Services Unit Voting Assistance Officers (UVAOs), and Department of State (DOS) VAOs. For the second time since 2000, questionnaires were available over the Internet for responses from these groups. Also, this year the FVAP conducted the first email-only survey sent to DOS VAOs.

Using contractor support, paper surveys were distributed beginning November 3, 2004. Websites became available for responses on November 3, 2004 as well. Paper and website responses were accepted until March 31, 2005. Response rates for all populations were adequate for data analysis and comparison purposes.

Survey Highlights

- Interest in the election was very high among all groups. The high rate of voter participation in all groups can be attributed to an effective voter information and education program with command support and agency emphasis on the voting program by each of the Services and the DOS. State/territory progress in simplifying their absentee voting procedures is also an indicator. In 2004, voting participation for Uniformed Services members, federal civilians overseas, and non-federally employed overseas citizens was higher than in any past Presidential election.
- The total voting participation rate among the Uniformed Services members was 79% in 2004, as compared to the 64% rate of the general public. Participation includes 53% voting absentee (37% in 2000), 20% voting in person (no change from 2000), and 6% attempting to vote (12% in 2000). The 79% overall participation rate is an increase of 10 percentage points from 2000.

- The total voting participation rate among federal civilian employees overseas was 80% in 2004. Participation includes 72% voting absentee (52% in 2000), 5% voting in person (3% in 2000) and 3% attempting to vote (10% in 2000). The 80% overall participation rate is an increase of 15 percentage points from 2000.
- The total voting participation rate among non-federally employed overseas U.S. citizens was 58% in 2004. Participation includes 49% voting absentee (20% in 2000), 4% voting in person (2% in 2000) and 5% attempting to vote (15% in 2000). The 58% overall participation rate is an increase of 21 percentage points from 2000.
- The 2004 post election results for Uniformed Services members and U.S. civilians overseas reflect the DOD's dedicated effort to improve the absentee voting process. The number of unsuccessful attempts to vote in each population group was cut by one-half to over two-thirds. As a reason for not voting, not knowing how to get an absentee ballot has decreased significantly for all groups. Contributing to this success was the increased number of worldwide training workshops conducted. There were 164 workshops conducted in 2004 compared to 62 in 2000.
- The FPCA continues to be the primary method used to register and request an absentee ballot. Of those who requested an absentee ballot, 64% of Uniformed Services members used the FPCA, compared to 68% of federal civilians overseas and 64% of non-federally employed overseas U.S. citizens. The online FPCA showed significant usage. The online FPCA was accessed 774,385 times between November 2003 and December 2004.
- For the Uniformed Services population, the most commonly used form of voting assistance continued to be the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO), followed by the FVAP website and the *Voting Assistance Guide* (VAG). For federal civilians overseas, however, the FVAP website and the VAG were the most used forms of voting assistance. For non-federally employed overseas U.S. citizens, the embassy/consulate VAOs and the FVAP website were the most used forms of assistance.
- Use of the FVAP website increased significantly for all populations since the last report with a satisfaction rate of 90%. The FVAP website was accessed 8,238,711 times between November 2003 and December 2004.
- Voters requested their ballots earlier in 2004 and ballots were being received earlier as well. Survey respondents from all groups reported a higher percentage of ballots returned in 2004.
- Sixty-seven percent of Uniformed Services VAOs provided voting assistance to 25 or more people. Fifty percent of DOS VAOs provided voting assistance to 501-2000 voters.
- Sixty-seven percent of the local election official respondents accepted electronically transmitted (faxed) FPCA requests for absentee ballots in 2004. Twenty-four percent (18% in 2000) of the local election officials faxed blank absentee ballots to *UOCAVA* citizens and 30% (13% in 2000) accepted faxed voted ballots from these citizens.

- The top three problems the local election officials reported when processing FPCAs were no or inadequate voting residence address, mailing address inadequate, or writing illegible.
- Seventy-five percent of local election officials said that they acknowledged the FPCA by using the FPCA return postcard. Fifty-one percent began mailing absentee ballots on or before September 25th, while 93% mailed absentee ballots by October 9th.